

Mensetsu

Senior Project Submitted to The Division of Art
of Bard College

by
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Mensetsu by Arya Popli
Artist Statement

Mensetsu is a mirror of my experiences growing up in Tokyo. However, this narrative extends beyond personal experience. This is the story of anyone who is Japanese and not Japanese.

The kanji for the term *Mensetsu*, defined as "interview", can be broken down into two parts. The first, "men" (面), is defined as a face, or to face something. The second kanji, "setsu" (接), is defined as to coming in contact. By putting these letters together, one can understand the context of the word *Mensetsu* - where two faces come into contact and interact with one another.

To be hafu (mixed-race) is the very act of *Mensetsu*. Having two faces in constant contact there is a constant interview of identity, both sides equally questioning and receiving interrogation. Culturally and interpersonally, this interrogation is a constant presence, manifested as much in the stares we receive as being called foreigner in our own country.

The shooting process of *Mensetsu* is a testament to these interrogations. Though outlined, the performances are mostly unscripted — it was not necessary to have my friends remember the dialogue as all interactions in *Mensetsu* are directly taken from our shared experiences. This allowed for my friends to improvise and tell their stories through each scene.

On the other hand, it is important to acknowledge that *Mensetsu* is Salam's experience. Though many of these experiences are communal among hafus, anti-blackness in Japan extends beyond my experiences, the experiences of brown hafus, and that of foreigners. There is an often-tangible difference in the experiences of half black hafus compared to other hafus. However, through Salam acting out his personal and shared experiences, insight is provided into our lives.

Mensetsu is the document of our shared experience; our two faces revealing themselves and speaking on the difficulties of being hafu. This film is made for me, my friends, and anyone who relates to these experiences.